



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Confidential Claim Retracted

Authorized by: *g*

Date: *6/12/13*

AUG 28 1984

Vincenti Pedro, Sr.
Governor
Pueblo of Laguna
P.O. Box 194
Laguna, New Mexico 87026

Dear Governor Pedro:

This is in response to your telegram of July 27 and your letter of July 31 requesting assistance in determining the health impact to residents of the Pueblo of Laguna, and to mine workers there, as a result of past uranium mining and proposed reclamation activities on Pueblo lands. The Indian Health Service (IHS) appreciates your concern and is aware of the potential for problems related to the mining activity.

We have not ignored this situation. Quite to the contrary, we have taken several actions to determine the degree to which a health hazard exists as a result of mining and reclamation activities at locations such as the Pueblo of Laguna. Environmental sampling has been accomplished on both air and water in the Paguate area since 1975. The results have consistently shown that levels of radiation do not exceed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards of acceptability. Radiological surveys were conducted prior to 1979 in homes at Paguate as well as throughout all villages at Laguna. Clay deposits used by pottery craftsmen were also surveyed. The results of all surveys were negative. A more recent follow-up radiological survey of 25 suspect locations at the Pueblo was conducted by the EPA in February 1981. None of those locations, which included inhabited homes, abandoned structures, and rock piles, were found to present a threat to human health.

The IHS met with staff from the United States Geological Survey in 1981, in both Washington, D.C. and Albuquerque, N.M., and with staff from the Bureau of Land Management in January 1984, to discuss reclamation plans for the Jackpile-Paguate mine. We have also reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for that project. The final EIS will be reviewed by IHS and by the National Center for Devices and Radiological Health of the Food and Drug Administration, to ensure that the proposed activity will not produce levels of radiation inconsistent with standards established by the EPA.

Members of the IHS headquarters staff met with Pueblo of Laguna representatives on August 15, 1983 regarding this subject. At that time, Pueblo representatives expressed concern about the radiological health impact that the mining may have had on the people living in the village of Paguate. They suggested that a study be undertaken to evaluate the effect upon, and to establish a health profile of, the villagers. They also suggested that a need to establish a monitoring program for miners exists, because the miners probably received higher exposures to radiation.



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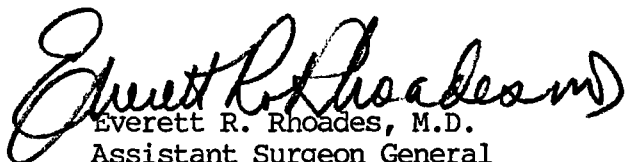
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A study of health hazards to Indians as a result of nuclear resource development on or near Indian lands was mandated by Section 707(a) of the Indian Health Care Amendments of 1980. The IHS prepared a report on this subject and submitted it to Congress in April 1983. In addition, Section 707(b) of the 1980 Amendments required that the IHS prepare, and submit to Congress a health care plan which would address the health problems identified in the study. This plan has been completed and was submitted to Congress in June 1984; a copy is enclosed for your information. The health care plan recognizes that any impact upon the health of individuals living near, or engaged in, uranium mining activities would not become apparent for many years. Furthermore, no technique currently exists which would enable a medical practitioner to diagnose future health problems as a result of radiation exposure.

We agree that a long term study is needed to determine the health impacts of past mining operations. The Acoma, Canoncito, Laguna Service Unit (ACLSU) has proposed that a screening program for the uranium miners be implemented, and a questionnaire has been developed for this purpose. The Service Unit has also asked that the Pueblo provide the names of all uranium miners and a census listing for the village of Paguate from the time the mine began operation. The census listing would be used to screen the medical records of those living in the village since mining operations commenced. Apparently, some difficulty has been encountered in obtaining this information because lists have not been provided to the Service Unit. The screening was to have been accomplished utilizing the Service Unit staff employed at the time the information was requested. Unfortunately, the physician who was expected to perform the study and the screening left the Service Unit in July and the Service Unit does not have another physician available to devote full time to the study at this time.

I suggest that you and other interested members of the Pueblo of Laguna Council meet with the Director, Albuquerque Area IHS, the Director, ACLSU, and other appropriate IHS staff to develop a plan for obtaining the information needed to begin this study. The Director, ACLSU and his staff are still willing to carry out a study but it must be done within present staffing and budget constraints.

Sincerely yours,



Everett R. Rhoades, M.D.
Assistant Surgeon General
Director, Indian Health Service

Enclosure